TOP HITS OF 87'
baileylauren98
baileylauren
bailey_lauren

Top Hits of '87 by baileylauren

Category: Stranger Things, 2016
Genre: Drama, Romance
Language: English
Characters: Eleven/Jane H., J. Hopper, Mike W., Will B.
Status: In-Progress
Published: 2018-02-13 15:41:55
Updated: 2018-02-13 15:41:55
Packaged: 2019-12-17 00:41:38
Rating: M
Chapters: 1
Words: 7,430
Publisher: www.fanfiction.net
Summary: Mike and Eleven are done with the monsters of Hawkins for now, but that doesn't mean they're in the clear as far as parents and high school go. Not even close. A new girl starts at Hawkins High with a specific mission: talk to Will Byers, Zombie Boy, and save her missing twin brother. She doesn't mean to drag the whole gang into her disaster, let alone across state lines.

Top Hits of '87

Jim Hopper has become more than annoyed at his adoptive daughter's obsession with one very obnoxious pop song, which could be heard floating through the hallways of the Byers-Hopper blended family home. Will had begged for ear plugs a week after Eleven had received a boombox for her sixteenth birthday, and that was before she'd heard the song she currently blares at least twice an hour. Joyce had stuck up for her, reasoning that twelve years was a long time to go without music. She said it more than warranted a certain enthusiasm in discovering rhythm and meaningful lyrics. By week two, Joyce was running out for earplugs of her own.

Now, the Friday twenty days after her birthday party, Jim's standing in the hardware store looking at rakes. He's looking at rakes because at El's party nearing three weeks ago he had fallen on his rake and broken it. He first tried duct-taping it together, but the handle had too much wobble and eventually the tape unstuck itself and the rake was in two pieces again. Then he tried wood glue, but something in the cold, biting November air kept it from curing properly and it snapped in half as Hop was moving one leave pile into another. Third, he tried just using the bottom half of the rake but his back was aching after twenty minutes. His last effort had been a combination of wood glue and duct-tape. He smoothed the glue and wrapped a neat strip of tape around it, wanting it to look as nice as possible. He picked it up the next morning from his workbench in the garage and brought it outside, refreshed from his good night's sleep and confident in his creation. He gently set it on the ground in front of some leaves, dragging it across the yard. He muttered a triumphant ha! as he noticed it was working and not bending like it had when he used only the tape. As he lifted it to drag it again, only the top half of the handle came up with his hands. The bottom half and the fan of prongs tipped down flat on the ground and Jim Hopper let out a very loud CURSE YOU, MICHAEL WHEELER because the idiot had been the first piece of the twisted Rube-Goldberg Machine that had ended in the demise of his ol' reliable rake.

They had all been out in the driveway, waiting for the last two kids to get there. El was trying to teach Dustin how to use a skip-it and

Will had just handed Mike his yellow boomerang. Will waved his hello as the final boy biked up and watched as he dismounted his bike and kicked out the stand. Mike had apparently not noticed his approach. Lucas had clapped his back in greeting as the freckled boy slung the boomerang in the air. Stupid Michael Wheeler forgot, somehow, that boomerangs sling back to you, and diverted his attention to chatting with his newly arrived friend. Three seconds later, stupid Michael Wheeler was knocked in the stomach by the overthrown boomerang. He landed on his ass, legs spread haphazardly and a stupid look on his stupid face. Max was skating in, as she'd trailed behind Lucas on his bike, and failed to notice the placement of stupid Wheeler's stupid right foot. She skated directly into it on her way to tell Eleven happy birthday, twisting stupid Wheeler's foot with an unsettling snap and stopping her board. Now, if you know anything about the basics of physics, you know that objects in motion stay in motion, and that's exactly what poor Max did. She was stumbling, trying to regain footing and she barreled square into a rake-wielding Hopper. They both tumbled to the ground with another sickening crack. Hopper groaned and Joyce ran to them.

"Oh my goodness, are you two okay?" She quickly looked them over, but found no real signs of injury.

"Eugh, aargh," Hop grumbled as he stood, "My god damn rake!" He held the two pieces in his hands, trying to fit them together again. He heard El gasp. "I know, my poor rake!" He whined, the rake had been the only one he'd ever owned for over three years that hadn't lost a prong.

"No!" She cried, and Jim turned to see her dropping quickly to her knees (too quickly, he was sure she'd scraped them) in front of Mike. "My poor Mike!" And soon, the whole party had gathered around where Mike sat, clutching his ankle. Hop was left alone in the yard, clutching his rake and pouting over everyone's lack of sympathy.

Wheelers cheeks were covered in angry red blotches and Jim could tell the kid was in some serious pain by the ugly, bloated look on his face. He did his best to shake the expression when he noticed the concern etched on his girlfriend's normally relaxed features, brows knit closely together and mouth screwed up to one side. He smiled tightly and Hop was surprised to see it only slightly resembled a

wince.

"Hospital!" El turned to Hopper. "He needs to go, now!"

"Really, El, it's okay. Just a little sore. I'll be fine in a day or two."

"Not fine, I heard a sound. Friends don't lie, Mike." She chastised gently.

"If he says he's okay, he's okay. Back up a bit and let him stand." Jim said, clearing a space for Mike to test his ankle out. The boy stood and Jim pretended not to hear his quiet grunt. He put pressure on it, only a little, and the older man saw the kid's eyes widen sharply as he stood fully on it.

"See?" His voice was only minutely higher pitched than usual, "It's alright." And he did a bit of walking, just a small circle to prove his point. El didn't seem fully convinced, but everyone else was content to move forward.

"Mike's always a big baby about it when he's really hurt, El. Don't worry." The curly one, Dustin, patted her on the shoulder. She appeared mildly sure of Mike's health now and moved to grab his hand.

"Well!" Jim boomed, intentionally startling his de facto daughter, and she dropped the arm she had been reaching for her boyfriend's hand with. "Want to go inside and open presents?" He raised his brows at El in question. Her eyes lit up and she nodded furiously, a wide smile on her face as she picked up Mike's hand in stride, dragging him quickly into the house through the open garage. Joyce bit her lip as she watched him stumble and hop to avoid running on his right ankle. The crew filed inside after the two and Mike's injury was forgotten about in a haze of ribbons, wrapping paper, plastic cutlery, and cake.

Jim kept a hawk's eye on Wheeler at all times during their living room showing of Stand By Me. Jim certainly didn't laugh when one of the annoying twerps started talking at the end of the movie.

"I think it would have been better if the body they found turned out

to be a dummy planted by shady government officials. Should have been a sci-fi romance!" Dustin cried out. Wheeler leaned forward and his hand rested on El's mid-thigh, pushing her pale blue dress a little further up her thigh as he laughed. Jim didn't miss how comfortable the little shit seemed doing it, and El didn't even flinch. In fact, she shifted towards him slightly as his thumb stroked across her skin. Her cheeks flushed crimson when she peeked in his direction and caught him narrowing his gaze at them. She shut her eyes and Wheeler's head turned to look at her quickly. He lifted his hand from her leg to scratch the side of his nose and he set it back down in his own lap. Jim only squinted further and made a note to ask her about that later.

The kids, aside from Mike, left at eight and the couple began cleaning the mess that had been abandoned in the living room. They shooed Joyce out, telling her that she should go relax after hosting a six hour party. She did so, grudgingly, when Hop said he would even do the dishes if she would just please go fill the tub for herself. He'd gone to the kitchen to do his promised chore, and he was being extra careful in splashing the cups and plates in the water, keeping any noise minimal. He wanted to hear whatever was being said (or done) in the living room. He would never admit to being overbearing, as far as he was concerned, there was no such thing for El. The girl had been through enough as it was, he was only making sure she didn't hurt anymore.

"I have something else to give you, El." The boy's voice was faint, so he paused his scrubbing to tune his ears to the teens in the next room.

"A second present?" El sounded positively shocked and delighted at the prospect. "You didn't need to." She had been overjoyed at his earlier present of a bundle of mix-tapes. Joyce had given Mike their present idea so that he could coordinate. Him had harrumphed and scowled when he found out. He knew El adored music and would undoubtedly blare these cheesy songs from her boyfriend over and over. He'd been genuinely surprised when she'd opened the gift and Mike began raving about the great bands on the tapes. He snatched the song list to find that most songs were, in fact, not named things like 'I Love You' or 'We're Mad in Love' or 'Don't Tell Your Dad I

Touched Your Boob,' even though he was sure the last one was not a song at all. He refocused himself on the teens' current conversation. He peeked over his shoulder to see Mike holding a long velvet box. He whipped his head straight back down to the dishes in a panic. Jewelry? They're serious enough for nice jewelry? He felt his head lightening and forced himself to resume breathing.

"I wanted to," Mike assured her, voice thick with excitement, "This one's more special."

"Why wait to open it?" She questioned.

"I didn't want everyone around to bug us about it just yet." He explained. Jim heard El gasp, and he knew it must be expensive. "I shoveled and mowed and raked all year to save."

"Beautiful." She breathed. "Can I put it on?"

"Let me." There were a few moments of silence as he fastened the necklace just below her hairline. Jim stared at them openly now, he knew they wouldn't pay him any attention at that point. Wheeler brushed her curls back into place and she turned around, beaming.

"Thank you, Mike!" She pounced on him and he stumbled onto the couch with a grunt of pain. "Mike," She spoke as though he were in trouble, "Your ankle."

"I promise it's okay, I just have to be gentle driving, maybe use my left foot." He kissed her forehead and smiled at her, love pouring from the gesture. They turned the TV on and Jim went on scrubbing his dishes, furiously now.

"Hey, guys, its nine!" Jim tried not to take pleasure in breaking them up on the couch but found that to be entirely impossible. Wheeler got up and hugged El goodbye, looking at Hop like a deer caught in a pair of high-beams as she kissed his cheek. El sat on the bench by the windowsill, clutching a throw in one arm and watching him as he backed out of the drive and putted away, as usual. But this time, she had her hand to her collarbone where the pendant of her new necklace laid. She turned to face Hop and dropped it.

"Pretty, right? She said, catching him staring at the delicate chain and odd pendant made up of small dots and thin wires connecting them.

"What is it?" He asked.

"Perseus, the con-stell-a-tion" She said slowly, making sure to pronounce the words right. "He's the Medusa slayer. Mike says I'm like him, but on the Earth and in the upside down instead of in the stars." Hopper was not a romantic person, by any means whatsoever, but even he had to admit that the sentiment was unparalleled in his experience.

"That's beautiful. Very thoughtful." Joyce said from the hall, hair still wet from her bath. She crossed the room to inspect it. "That boy must really, really love you to think about your gift so much."

"I know." El smiled softly. Jim knew it, too, the following Monday. El returned from school, Mike in tow with a cast on his right ankle and crutches tucked under his arms. That boy must really, really love his daughter to walk around on a broken ankle for hours just because he knows how much hospitals remind her of the lab. It was weird, knowing they had that level of devotion, and he was going to do his damnedest to forget it. Really, he cringed just thinking of it.

A familiar "hmhmhmhmhm,hmm" pulls Jim from his thoughts and returns him to the hardware store and the rakes he's currently poring over. He only picks up on one word, but it's plenty to send him into a paralyzing spiral of fatherly panic. He darts to the front of the store and aims his finger at the clerk.

"Turn up the song." He demands.

"Sir, I'm not allowed to touch th-"

"Jesus, kid, just turn the damn song up for ten seconds!" Hopper's voice is beginning to gain volume, and the pimply teen quickly pulls the tape off of the volume dial, turning it a few notches higher. Thankfully, the song is seriously repetitive and he only has to listen to another four seconds to hear, 'I think we're alone now,' and this is when his mere annoyance with the recurrent tune blossoms into something much worse: anger. He storms out of the store, leaving the

gobsmacked clerk to stare out the door for a moment or two before cautiously turning the music back down.

It's a Friday and Jim knows that means Wheeler will be with El at the house. And he is, Hop thinks as he pulls up to the driveway. Thankfully for Mike and Ed, they were really, truly studying algebra today. Eleven is sitting on her bed, legs crossed and book sat open in front of her. Mike has just finished explaining the answer to one of her questions for the second time.

"I'm so stupid." El throws her head into her hands and closes her eyes.

"What?" Mike turns to her from his place at her desk, cast thwacking against the leg of the chair. He's still not used to the clunky thing. "You are not stupid."

"I don't get any of this without you telling me how three times, Mike. I'm stupid." She pulls her face from her hands.

"It doesn't make you stupid because I have to explain things to you. You're still learning how to learn, you didn't get taught anything for a long time. You're super smart." She looks at him, a sad smile in place of the normal pursed lips of concentration she normally wears when they study.

"S'okay, they're already talking about putting me in a lower math."

"What? You do great on all the tests!"

"She thinks I cheat. Since she thought I was passing you notes but couldn't find the paper. She thinks I have some special place to hide it."

"Well we weren't passing notes, so of course she wouldn't find a paper. Though, if you didn't want her investigating you shouldn't have giggled in the middle of silent reading time." Mike teases her. There's a pause and it seems like her mind is on something else.

"Hop asked me about it." She says after a few seconds.

"Wait, what? About the note thing?"

"No, about the not-note thing. After you left on my birthday and I was brushing my teeth for bed. He said, 'Can you guys read each other's minds?' and Joyce was there and she spilled the peas." El smiles. "Oh, you kind of figured it out!" She imitates Joyce.

"Woah. Did you explain how you think it works? How it happened?" Mike ignores her minor misuse of 'spilled the beans' like he always does when she mixes up a phrase. He gets what she means so why bug her about it?

"He wouldn't shut up about how great it would be if we could. Had to tell him I was pretty sure it was 'cause I visited you so much in the black. Hasn't brought it up since."

"Well, now whenever we're quiet he'll be bothering us, asking us what we're gabbing about."

"Gabbing?"

"It's just another word for talking, but usually it means the conversation is dumb or pointless or annoying."

"Oh." El says, frowning. There are so many words that mean the same thing. "See, Mike. I'm stupid."

"Stop it. There's a big difference between being stupid and not knowing something. I hardly ever need to explain a word to you twice." He looks at his wristwatch. "We should get back to math, though, or we'll never finish. Don't worry about Ms. Sullivan, I'll talk to her tomorrow about how much I work with you outside of school." He turned around in the desk to face his book. "Let's just start from section 3b again, on page 68. In a linear function with-"

The door swings open wildly and Hopper, breathing heavily, stands in the doorway. He takes in their textbooks and thanks the deity he doesn't really have faith in the existence of that they were keeping it G-Rated this afternoon.

"Play that stupid song you're obsessed with." He commands.

"Not stupid." She furrows her brow. "We said you'd knock."

"Extenuating circumstance." He explains, which really doesn't help El. She mouths the words to herself, trying to think of what they may mean. He purses his lips. "Just play it."

"Don't blame us if you don't knock," She crosses the room, going from her bed to her dresser, pressing play on her boombox. The tape was conveniently already inserted, "and you see something you don't like." Mike's eyes shoot up to his hairline.

"Not that you ever would!" He panics. "We really do study and-"

"Shut it, Wheeler." Hopper closes his eyes in discomfort and annoyance.

Children behave

That's what they say when we're together

And watch how you play

The music rings out, meaning clear. Hopper's eyes open and zero in on Mike, who feels his mouth go dry. He swallows, trying to restart the glands, but damn his whole body is clenching in fear. Even the little spit-bits. His heart-rate soars and he's frozen in place.

They don't understand

And so we're

Running just as fast as we can

Holding on to one another's hand

Trying to get away into the night

And then you put your arms around me

And we tumble to the ground

And then you say

I think we're alone now

"Turn it off." Hopper is quiet, but Mike knows he is no less dangerous. El pushes the button before he is even done asking, waiting for the response she's been expecting the whole time. For the yelling. "This door doesn't shut anymore." He says, still hovering in the doorway. "It stays open when Mike is here."

"No." She speaks, sure of herself. "My door." She returns Hopper's glare headily.

"Don't escalate this, kid."

"I'm punished for liking a song? Unfair and mean."

"It's not a punishment, it's just a new rule."

"New rules are for when you are bad, when you can't follow the old ones. Good kids don't need rules." Her fists are beginning to clench.

"It's not for you at all, it's a reassurance for me." Hopper is really trying to keep her telekinesis under control.

"What do you need to be sure of?" She challenges.

"That you're not, that you don't-" Hopper struggles to find words that will diffuse the situation. "That you don't forget how young you are."

"My life was worse than your bad dreams, harder than you know." She's darkening, eyes losing their light. It's like she's slinking back into 011, cradled too tightly against Papa's bare chest.

"Equally as many everyday things you haven't experienced." Hopper seems to be forgetting the powers his teenage daughter holds, instead focusing on making his point.

"Things like what?" She says, like there's nothing she could possibly have not experienced, because maybe there's not.

"Loss."

"I lost Mike. I lost Mama, and Kali. Nothing else I could lose, all taken from me before I could see it was missing." Tears well in her eyes. "What else, dad?" He doesn't miss the bite in her voice or the sting in

her eyes.

"Heartbreak." He tosses a glance at Mike.

"Hey," The boy defends, indignant at the insinuation and slightly annoyed at being dragging into the argument, "I'm not going anywhere."

"Of course that's what you say Wheeler." Hopper rolls his eyes because that's what everybody says in the peak of their relationship. "But what about college? What about the next pretty thing you stumble across?"

"She's not just some pretty thing to me, Chief." Mike tries to keep his voice even and kind, despite the attack on his character.

"Leave Mike alone." El scowls.

"I will if you will." Hopper returns. She's stunned.

"What are you even trying to keep from happening?" El is bubbling up, dangerously close to exploding. "You are the one who is hurting me."

"So that he can't hurt you more later? Fine by me." Hop's voice is a near shout.

Joyce peeks her head out from the master bedroom where she had been folding laundry and listens on in worry. Things haven't been this volatile in a long time, not since they had just moved into the house, and the fights like this they used to have left both El and Hop drained and grumpy for two days. They are both intensely important to each other, and it creates friction when you factor in extra pieces that are important to one or the other, pieces like Mike. But it's been a year or so since their last actual fight, when Hopper had walked into El's room without knocking: Mike was over and they were decidedly not studying. El had broken her window during that fight, Mike had scuttled away from the situation with his tail between his legs, and Joyce had to clean up the small cuts on Hopper's skin from the flying glass. She convinced him that, yes, it was normal for Mike and Eleven to kiss and touch a little bit, and she reminded him that

he was long-since not a virgin at Mike's age and at least they were mostly clothed. Eleven had stubbornly slept in the cool nighttime air of early October for two nights before Hopper had gone in and apologized. Joyce had come up with the agreement that he would knock and wait for her go-ahead for twelve seconds (there was a little back and forth on the length of time he should pause, Jim thought three and El thought thirty, but Joyce convinced him that three was too short and told her that twelve would be enough) before coming in on his own. Joyce really doesn't want to spend this weekend repairing their relationship and her home, or stuffing towels along the bottom of the door to keep the heat in the house.

Will sits against the wall beside his door, listening in. He has to be a little less obvious about his eavesdropping because he doesn't have the ability to wordlessly placate Hopper like his mother does. He loves his friends and he's really growing to care for the chief but he can't help feeling like an intruder in his own goddamn house when stuff like this happens. He wishes that Jonathan were still here, he would come into his room and joke with him about how stupid their argument is. Who cares if the door is open or closed? They all know Mike and Eleven won't have sex when people are home, or at least when they think people are home. Will doesn't even want to get into remembering that time he'd planned to go to dinner and a movie with Dustin but ended up skipping the movie portion because he felt sick. He only stepped inside for three seconds before he was biking to the Wheelers' house, to Nancy. She pulled him inside quickly and fed him soup, sympathetically tucking him into the basement couch and turning on Star Wars for him. She'd offered to talk about it but highly appreciated when he said he felt no need to. She drove him home when the movie was over, strapping his bike to the top of her station wagon and she reversed out of his driveway with a commiserating wave. He couldn't even look at Mike and Eleven as he untied his shoes. He raced past them and up the stairs to his room where he stayed ill the next day.

"How could he hurt me more with the door closed?" El is going to make him say it. He refuses.

"By doing things that he wouldn't if the door were open." She wants him to face his words, to admit what he's afraid of.

"Like kissing? Touching?" Chief is silent, and it speaks volumes. He can't say no because that is what he means, and he can't say yes because the idea of it happening makes his eyelids sweat and forces his jaw to fix shut like a clam out of the sea. El can sense this, somehow. "Then you misunderstand. The parts of Mike I miss when he is gone are his voice and his smile. Anyone can kiss your mouth, only special people can kiss your heart." Joyce, down the hall, is momentarily breathless at the simple eloquence of the statement. Even though she's been living in a house with the girl for a year now, she will never get used to her wisdom and purity. She seems so far beyond her years and it really kills Hopper's arguments as to why she should distance herself from her boyfriend. As far as Joyce is concerned, the kids have a far better idea of what love is than what she had when she first married Lonnie. They had sacrificed for each other and waited for each other and cried for each other. Three years they'd been dating, and they're still nowhere near sick of each other. Let them kiss, let them hold each other, Joyce would always try to convince Hop. He never took her advice and he likely never will. He's too stubborn and, truthfully, too much of a know-it-all.

Will closes his eyes and lays his head back on his blue, striped wallpaper. El's statement strikes him right where he's feeling doubt, where he's vulnerable. He was the last one of his friends to get his first kiss. It was eight months ago, and the gorgeous Jennifer Hayes had been the one to deliver it. He could tell it was a well executed kiss, the movements of it all fitting together perfectly, good pressure and varied rhythm. He could tell the kiss had been a good one because he had enjoyed it even though he wanted to gag when she pressed her chest tight against him. He stopped her, telling her she was beautiful, and she'd blushed. And he'd meant it, he could appreciate beauty. Will knows what El means by anyone. Anyone like Jennifer Hayes can kiss your mouth. And he knows what she means by someone special. Only someone special like Phillip Washington can make you feel butterfly kisses against your left ventricle when you brush past him at the pencil sharpener. He tears up, scared of his future. He knows his family will love him, regardless, but the public isn't so generally accepting and they've only just gotten over calling him zombie boy. He doesn't need the masses shoving him around in a circle, spitting in his face and calling him fag like they do to Roger Haynes. But, he thinks hopefully, Roger Haynes doesn't have E.J.

Hopper for a sister.

Hopper is silent for a while, thinking. Her words are beautiful, and it's not the first (or the last) time he'll be astonished by them. He knows she's right about what she's saying, and he's almost convinced to let her keep door privileges. But he keeps cogitating about that damned song, how much it bugged him to think of them being alone. He knows it will be impossible to keep an eye on them constantly, especially with work and their freedom to go to the Wheeler house, but he doesn't think can't give up before he tries.

"So," He says squaring his jaw and locking eyes with El, "You shouldn't mind talking and laughing with the door open."

"Your door stays open at night, then, too." She huffs.

"You know that's different." Hopper sounds almost sorry.

"Because you've only been two years? Not like me and Mike and our three years, right?"

"Because we are older." His tone is getting more annoyed again. "Mike is the first boy you ever laid eyes on, how could you know he's the best for you?"

"Don't need to explain anything to you, it won't make a difference." Her eyes lose their fire and her face loses all its tensity. "Conversation is done." She sits back on her bed and waits for Hopper to leave.

"Jesus, El. Really?" He sighs, "Big girls finish their conversations instead of pretending they don't have anything else to say." He looks to Mike, expecting the boy to have the same bored expression on his face as he does. But he doesn't, he looks perplexed.

"What is she doing?" He waves his hand in front of her face and she doesn't move. "What does she mean, done? You clearly weren't done talking."

"She's quitting." Jim half-explains. "She's really never done this to you?"

"We don't argue." Mike offers a simple response and a shrug. He

doesn't know what to say back.

"Listen, kid," He says to El, "I'm just trying to make sure he doesn't cross any boundaries of yours." He tries to sound soft. Before he knows it, El's head is swivelling to him at full tilt and she's glowering at him.

"You're scared of my boyfriend crossing my boundaries so you take them from me?" Jim is still, bewildered by her return. She had never once come back from that state of uncaring until hours later. "The door is a boundary for you!" She's yelling now, pure spite spilling from her lips. "Mike and I have no boundaries. None. And we have sex!" She sneers and Mike's eyes slam shut, fearful of what she might say next. "We have sex a lot and I love it! I feel it in my toes for hours after, after he fucks me over the table in the AV club room, behind the waterfall at the quarry, along the shores of Ossabaw Island, once even against the back of your truck-" Mike's eyes fly open to see that Jim has crossed the room to silence El with a resounding smack of his palm against her cheek.

"Jesus, Hopper!" Mike is up from his spot in the chair and wrapping an arm around the dazed girl who begins to shake and cry in his arms.

"Get out!" The man shouts in his face, and he blinks in the force of the words.

"I think it's better for her if-"

"Just get the fuck out of my house, Wheeler!" Jim looked crazed at this point, shocked at himself for laying a harsh hand on his daughter and growing increasingly angry watching her sleazeball boyfriend look at him like he was a beast.

"I'll come tomorrow." He whispers to her and she locks her arms behind him, shaking her head to the negative.

"Don't go." Her face is pressed into his chest and her words are muffled.

"I have to." He strokes the back of her head and she sobs.

"No." She whines, tears in her eyes as she looks up at him. He reaches behind his back and pulls her arms from around him.

"I'm sorry, El." He chokes out, starting for the door as she frantically clutches at his arm.

"Please, bring me." Mike wills the liquid pooling in his waterline to go away. She sounds so despondent, so broken and scared.

"I would, if I could promise we would both live." He tries to laugh but it comes out as a sort of cough from trying so hard to hold his tears back. Her lip wobbles and her grip tightens on his arm. "Baby, I swear I will be back tomorrow and everything will be okay." He pries her fingers from his skin. He looks like he's going to say something else, but Hopper takes a step toward him and he turns.

"Love you." Is all she can manage. When Jim strains his neck to watch the prick leave, he sees Joyce standing in the doorway reaching her arms out to him. Her eyes are dim with worry, cast down and desperately avoiding contact with his. He can handle Michael Wheeler looking at him like he's a wild ape tossing his shit around in a fit but Joyce is a different story. He can't stand her inability to look at him, like she wants to pretend it's someone else standing there, someone else who had just hit their child.

"Come on, honey, let's get you..." Her voice trails off but he can hear it shake slightly.

"El," He says, voice soft. She just continues to cry, staring out the door like she's willing Mike to come back. "El, please I'm sorry-" She flinches when he touches her elbow. She actually flinches and steps back, away from him.

"You are like Papa." She spits.

"This again? We've been through th-"

"No, you are. You make me do what you want me to no matter how I feel or what I say and you hurt me when I don't." She draws her lips together in a mixture of a scowl and a pout. "You are like Papa." Jim was stupefied and felt himself beginning to suffocate, ceiling

dropping down on him and door becoming greater and greater lengths away from him. He needs to get out of this room, out of the stuffy air and away from the purple walls that seem to be staring in disapproval. He gives her one last look but her head is turned away from him.

"I'm sorry, I break every promise I make to you." He walks out of her bedroom and shuts the door behind him, leaning up against it and closing his eyes.

"I know I'm smaller than you but I will come at you like a lion does to an elephant if you ever fucking lay your hand on her again." He hears Will.

"I get it, kid." He says, dismissively.

"You really don't get it." He opens his eyes and looks at the boy who's standing down the hallway from him, feet shoulder-width apart and fists balled at his sides. "I like you, but, she's my sister and Mike's my best friend, they deserve happiness without you trying to rip it from them all the time. You're going to kill your relationship with her and push her right into his arms if you keep going at this rate. Well, she's already in his arms but she's still sorta holding your hand and she'll drop it if she has to, if you keep pulling. I'll just chop your fucking arm off if you don't cool it." With that, Will recedes into his room and Hopper realizes that he's been so focused on Eleven and Mike that he hasn't been trying to get to know Will like he'd planned to. He suddenly feels like he must be the shittiest dad in the universes and slams the top of his fist against his forehead.

"Hey, Jim?" It's Joyce beside him, now. She's hesitant to approach him but knows he won't hurt her.

"Hmm?" He asks, hands flying up to his face and fingers pushing against his eyelids, pressing his emotion back into place.

"Come to bed, yeah?" She tugs on his elbow and he steps away from El's door, dropping his hands from his eyes.

"Yeah." He affirms. Maybe his pillow will suffocate him while he sleeps and he won't have to face the music of what he's done. He goes

into the bathroom to brush his teeth and avoids his reflection in the mirror. He can't look at himself anymore today. He can't look at the man who hit his daughter. He spits into the sink and rinses it out, tossing his toothbrush into the holder and heading back into the master bedroom. Joyce is in bed, book in hands and bedside lamp on. Jim flicks the switch for the overhead and strips into his underwear, climbing into bed.

"How are you doing?" She sets her book down and turns off the light. She knows it's easier for him to talk when he can't see everything around him. It makes him feel less surrounded.

"I'm an idiot." He responds, not really answering her question.

"Yeah?" She just encourages him to keep talking.

"I promised her I would never hurt her on purpose." He can feel his heart clawing its way up his throat. "She told me I was like Papa."

"You're not, Hop."

"She explained it perfectly. I am. I'm like him but I force her to not use her powers and other shit she doesn't want to do. I'm Pops, two qwerty keystrokes away from him. An inch different, maybe."

"You let things get out of control." She says, pausing. "You didn't walk in there with a plan to hit her as hard as you could, and you didn't walk out of there feeling like she deserved it. That's what that man would have done."

"If the outcome for El is the same then what's the real difference?"

"She gets to go to school, have a family and a boyfriend. She gets to blast music in her room and go to pointless school dances. She gets to have a life, and she knows you'll mean it when you apologize."

"I just-" Hop's voice is muffled by his hands rubbing his eyes again, "I really fucked up, and I don't know if she's gonna forgive me this time." Joyce grabs his hand and squeezes, not wanting to promise something she couldn't guarantee.

"Do you ever watch them?"

"What?"

"Mike and Eleven. Do you ever just look? Not just at one or the other, both of them. How they interact."

"Not really."

"That's why you don't understand." She says. She swears she can hear the cogs in his brain turning as they lay there in the dark. "I once watched them in the backyard, just sitting there with their legs crossed on the grass. They had their knees together and their foreheads were touching, hands held tight in the middle. They sat like that for two hours. It started raining and they didn't move, didn't even flinch. After a minute, I had to go out and shake El's shoulder and it was like she snapped out of some kind of trance, she looked at me and her eyes were completely black for a second or two. That's how I found out about their mind thing."

"I can't believe they can read each other's minds."

"They can send thoughts." Joyce corrects. "But she can bring him with her into the blackness. The void, the lab called it. Time goes more slowly there, she says. When she said that my jaw about fell to the floor. I just thought for hours about how much time they already spend together and wondered how they really feel the need to go to some other place where time slows down. It blows my mind how often they want to be together. I guess I sort of get it, if I had someone who took that immense of care for me at that age I would never have left their side. She gives him purpose and makes sure he doesn't kill himself with his martyr complex and he shows her the world, tells her what words mean and shows her how to catch fireflies. She thanks him for teaching her near everything she knows and he thanks her for teaching him everything he didn't. She declares he's the greatest thing in the universe and he proclaims she's the best in all of them. She says he's got the stars on his cheeks and he says she's got the stars in her heart, tells her she's like Perseus. This is just what I hear, you know? What do they say to each other when nobody is listening? Who knows the real extent of what they're feeling?"

"Nobody." He sighs. "And I took the most ignorant approach I could to that, I should have just talked to El. Alone."

"You shouldn't underestimate Mike, either." Joyce reminds him. "He's a great kid, he's always stuck up for Will and made sure he felt included. He's always been full in, with everything. Projects and games and emotions, all of it done to the hilt. And I think El came in, just as intense and they just clicked. Like, nobody could ever love them as fully as they love each other 'cause they're the only ones with that emotional capacity."

"I just wish they could love each other without touching each other."

"I'll let you talk to Eleven about that one." Joyce rolls over.

"Do you know something that I don't?" Jim turns his head to face her, even though their room is blanketed in darkness. She can still feel the warmth of his questioning gaze on the back of her head, even if he can't see it. She lets out a terrible sn-snort-shoooo, and Jim groans. "Both my wife and daughter enjoy ending conversations prematurely, I love it." And he rolls over, too.

"I love you." She murmurs into her pillow.

"We'll see if you still feel that way in the morning after I let 'er rip tonight."

"Oh, god!" Hop grins at the revenge rumbling hotly in his belly.

"Hey, you're the one who made bean casserole." Joyce only groans in response.